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AUTHOR Nacev, Vladimir; Brubach, April
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ABSTRACT

Teasing is an attempt to look better at the expense of someone else. This abuse may be as mild as verbal bantering or as severe as group violence against others. The chronically oppressed student may conclude that school is a frightening and unfriendly place. Teasing has recently become the focus of psychological research and this paper provides a theoretical framework to help understand the developmental process of those who bully. Research on family dynamics reports that the absence of a father is a factor for the children involved in bullying. Data also suggests that aggressive youth have experienced more punitive, hostile, and abusive family treatment than their peers. The paper highlights research that suggests that a school-based intervention program produced promising results in reducing bullying and victim problems. (Contains 23 references.) (JDM)

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Teasing Among School-age Children

Vladimir Nacev, Ph.D., ABPP, Strategies for Change

April Brubach, University of Maryland University College

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Teasing is a form of interpersonal expression. It may be expressed in verbal, non-verbal, and psychological behaviors and it is often traumatic to the victim. Teasing is a common means of showing emotion, control, power, and manipulation among all age groups and genders. It is an attempt to look better at the expense of someone else. This abuse may be as mild as teasing or as severe as group violence against individual students (Floyd, 1985; Greenbaum, 1987; Olweus, 1979). No matter the source or form of such abuse, the chronically oppressed student may conclude that the school is a frightening and unfriendly place to be. This presentation will focus on the theoretical understanding of the topic, discuss the characteristics of the family dynamics of bullies and victims, and address solutions for both parents and teachers.

Teasing has recently become the focus of psychological research (Olweus, 1991, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 1995; Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Tattum, 1989; Ziegler & Pepler, 1993). Studies indicate that a large number of children are involved in bullying at school (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1991, 1993; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Tattum, 1989; Ziegler &

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Pepler). Between 7% and 34% of school-aged children are involved in bullying occasionally during the school year (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1987; Perry et al.; Roland, 1989b; Stephenson & Smith; Yates & Smith, 1989; Ziegler & Pepler). The results of survey data indicate that bullying is pervasive in the school milieu (Olweus, 1991; Perry et al.; Stephenson & Smith; Ziegler & Pepler).

In his study on family cohesion and power, Berdondini, et al (1996), concluded that there was increased father absence in children involved in bullying. Similarly, he found that these children also showed lower cohesion with and between parents. Schwartz, et al (1997) examined the early family experiences of boys who later emerged as both aggressive and bullied during their middle school years. Their data suggested that the aggressive victim group had experienced more punitive, hostile, and abusive family treatment than the other groups. Craig (1998) studied the relationship among bullying, victimization, depression, anxiety, and aggression in elementary school children. He noted that male bullies reported more physical aggression than did comparison groups. He also noted that male bullies in the younger grades reported more physical and verbal aggression while male bullies in the older grades reported more verbal aggression. For females, however, group differences in aggression did not emerge until the older grades. A study by Kumpulainen, et al (1998) examined bullying and psychological symptoms among elementary

school-aged children. His results showed that more boys than girls were found to be involved in bullying. His data further showed that bullying-victims scored highest in externalizing behavior and hyperactivity while also reporting feelings of ineffectiveness and interpersonal problems. Among the victims group, they scored highest in the internalizing behavior and psychosomatic symptoms. The also concluded that children involved in bullying were psychologically disturbed, as evident by more bullying children being referred for psychiatric consultation. Smith and Myron-Wilson (1998) pointed out that bullying behavior has its roots in parenting and school environment. They cite a number of studies that have shown a relationship between violent behavior and harsh discipline in parents with bullying behavior in children, and over protectiveness in parents with victimization. Hoover and Hazler (1991) pointed out that bullies often lacked leadership qualities and that victims were often unpopular and lacked self-esteem. Oliver, Oaks, and Hoover (1994) identified some of the characteristics of the families of bullying children. They described those family environments as being emotionally cool, socially isolated, lacking structure or rules, having active parental conflicts, aggression was positively reinforced, non-aggression was punished, and the parents were rigid. Lowenstein (1977) reported similar findings.

In observing American schools, Okabayaashi (1996), found that a school intervention was most effective and it needed to address the

remedial, prevention, and developmental issues. Olweus (1997) suggested that a school-based intervention program produced promising results in reducing bully/victim problems.

Children teasing each other are a complex issue to understand, prevent, or treat. However, it has seriously infected our adolescent culture, schools, and families. The purpose of this presentation is several fold: (1) gain greater understanding about the nature of bullying; (2) explore the impact it has on the developmental process of those who are bullies and those who are victims; and (3) learn about some remedies for curbing its destruction. The ultimate beneficiaries will be both the bullies and their victims.

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